

VZCZCXR04187
PP RUEHDA
DE RUEHAK #5673/01 2720458
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 290458Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9060
INFO RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1381
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1164
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005673

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STATE PASS AID FOR THOMAS MEFFORD
DEPT FOR EUR/PPD AND EUR DAS C. GRAFFY
SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID PREL KPAO CVIS BEXP TU
SUBJECT: BIG PAY-OFF FROM SMALL BUSINESS PROJECT

1.(SBU) Summary: Using only \$400,000 of USG funding, a small project between the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its Turkish counterpart provided a big bang for the buck for the U.S.: good press, practical advice to Turkish SMEs, closer ties between U.S. and Turkish business organizations that should lead to future collaboration, and an opportunity for Mission outreach. End Summary.

Small But Effective Project

12. (SBU) With \$400,000 of Economic Support Fund (ESF) money appropriated in FY2004, a USAID-administered project has paid multiple benefits for bilateral U.S.-Turkish relations. The project, which emerged out of a request from the Turkish side in the December, 2003 Economic Partnership Commission, focused on helping encourage bilateral trade and business ties by providing information to Turkish small- and medium-sized businesses on how to do business in the U.S. A team from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce managed the project with cooperation by the Union of Turkish Chambers of Commerce (known by its Turkish abbreviation, TOBB).

13. (SBU) The centerpiece of the project was a series of one-day workshops for small business held in five cities around Turkey: Ankara, Kayseri, Izmir, Gaziantep and Istanbul. The seminars took place in July and September. The U.S. Chamber pulled together an impressive array of speakers from the U.S.: representatives of local U.S. Chambers, U.S.-based lawyers who specialize in Turkish business clients, logistics and marketing experts, and local Turkish entrepreneurs in each city who had managed to break into the U.S. market. John Bachmann, former President of the U.S. Chamber and current board member, opened each workshop along with a Turkish Chamber official and a representative of the U.S. Mission. In Ankara, the Ambassador (see text on post's web site) and TOBB Chairman Rifat Hisarciklioglu opened the workshop and in Istanbul the Consul General opened the event. At each workshop, consular officers made presentations on U.S. visa policies and procedures and FCS described its role in promoting U.S. exports. The workshops were well-attended, reaching hundreds of businesspeople from around Turkey, as well as multipliers such as representatives of chambers of commerce in other Turkish towns. TOBB has put all the presentations on its web site and the U.S. Chamber is preparing a practical handbook for use by Turkish businesses based on the presentations at the workshops.

Multiple Benefits

14. (SBU) The project helped advance U.S. interests in multiple ways:

--Positive press story: At a time of unrelenting anti-Americanism in

the Turkish press - particularly in July at the height of the Lebanon crisis - the coverage of this event provided a welcome positive story about U.S. government assistance to Turkish small businesspeople and a desire to deepen bilateral economic ties. The sessions in Ankara and Istanbul attracted national print and broadcast coverage, and regional press reported on the events in Izmir, Kayseri and Gaziantep.

--Supporting U.S.-Turkish friendship: Coming on the heels of the Secretary and Fonmin Gul's announcement of the Shared Vision and

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Structured Dialogue, these workshops provided a tangible example of USG interest in deepening economic relations and increasing business-to-business exchanges. The Ankara workshop provided a forum in which the Ambassador could emphasize bilateral economic policy priorities and situate them in the framework of the Shared Vision. TOBB had long sought the project as a way to establish their first ever formalized relationship with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. TOBB happiness over the project was manifested in their significant support and in-kind contributions, but perhaps most of all by the beaming expression on Chairman Hisarciklioglu's face as he stood by the Ambassador's side at the Ankara event. The project deepened our good relationship with TOBB on a range of issues, helping to firm up our support from a pro-American constituency inside Turkey.

--Deepening bilateral economic ties: The practical information and business leads in the workshops and the handbook will hopefully lead to more trade with the U.S. Now that the U.S. Chamber and TOBB have become well-acquainted the potential for the two organizations and their individual chambers to facilitate two-way trade is greatly increased -- a key objective of the program. In addition to the five workshops, the U.S. Chamber's contacts with the Istanbul Chamber led to signature of an agreement for the U.S. Chamber to conduct additional workshops in Istanbul, for which the Istanbul Chamber is footing the bill.

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--Outreach opportunity: By holding three of the workshops outside Ankara or Istanbul, the project provided multi-faceted outreach opportunities, allowing the U.S. mission, but also U.S. business, to show the flag in three provincial Turkish cities. Moreover, the workshops provided a targeted audience to which consular officials could defuse misconceptions about U.S. receptivity to business travel. The U.S. Commercial Service presentation attracted Turkish business people who are interested in importing from the U.S. or looking for U.S. partners.

McEldowney